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HIGH PRIORITY FOR LOW LEVELS. CHILDREN AND THEIR PRIMARY SCHOOLS, REPORT III.

BY- LEESON, JIM

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THE PLOWDEN REPORT, A STUDY OF GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND, CONCLUDED THAT FAMILY AND HOME ENVIRONMENT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT, AND THAT THERE SEEMS TO BE NO RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASS SIZE AND ACHIEVEMENT. ALTHOUGH CONCENTRATING ON PRIMARY SCHOOLS, THE REPORT MADE RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT A SERIES OF ANNUAL PRIORITIES FOR THE ENTIRE SCHOOL SYSTEM. THE STUDY FOUND SERIOUS INEQUITIES IN EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES FOR DIFFERENT SOCIAL CLASSES AND, THEREFORE, PLACED HIGHEST PRIORITY ON DEVELOPING A PROGRAM OF "POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION" TO FAVOR SCHOOLS IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS. THE REPORT STRONGLY FAVORED COMPENSATORY EDUCATION AND RECOMMENDED SMALLER CLASSES, SALARY SUPPLEMENTS FOR ALL TEACHERS, USE OF TEACHER AIDES, AND NEW AND RENOVATED SCHOOL BUILDINGS. ALSO SUGGESTED WERE EXTRA EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS, PRESCHOOLS FOR 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS, COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS BETWEEN TEACHERS COLLEGES AND DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS, INSERVICE TRAINING, SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES, AND PRIORITY ATTENTION TO ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS. FOR NONWHITE IMMIGRANT CHILDREN, THE REPORT RECOMMENDED COURSES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND URGED THE DEVELOPMENT OF APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1, JULY-AUGUST 1967. (NH)

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CHILDREN and their PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Report III

HIGH PRIORITY FOR LOW LEVELS

This is the last in a series of three articles by Jim Leeson describing three recently issued reports that deal with education of culturally disadvantaged children. Leeson spent two months in England this spring studying race relations and gathering information on the Plowden Report, which is the subject of this article. In subsequent issues of Southern Education Report, Leeson will write about other aspects of British education, including racial problems in English schools. An article about the U. S. Office of Education survey on equal educational opportunity appeared in the May issue, and the June issue contained an article on the report of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Racial Isolation in the Public Schools."

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Children and Their Primary Schools: *A report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), 2 vols., Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1967. Also available from British Information Services, 845 Third Ave., New York. $11.50.*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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By Jim Leeson

A study of England's government-supported schools has produced general agreement with a massive American survey that (1) family and home environment have the most important effect on a student's educational achievement and (2) no relation appears to exist between the size of classes and achievement.

Despite these similarities in findings, England's Plowden Report differed in scope and design from the U. S. Office of Education study, "Equality of Educational Opportunity." The American report, which was released in 1966, contained no recommendations, covered all grade levels and placed special emphasis on minorities. Plowden, on the other hand, centered on the younger school children and established a series of annual priorities to reach recommended objectives for the entire school system. The highest priority was given to steps to improve schooling in lower-class neighborhoods.

The two-volume report by the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) contains almost 1,300 pages. Entitled *Children and Their Primary Schools*, it takes its popular name from the chairman of the 25-member council, Lady Bridget Plowden. The minister of education requested the study in August, 1963, and the committee submitted its report and rec-

A West Indian works with English boys at Gillespie Primary School in Islington, London.

ommendations in October, 1966. The minister's instructions were "to consider primary education in all its aspects, and the transition to secondary education," which occurs in England at age 11.

Just as the length and complexity of the American report have tended to restrict the general knowledge of the findings, the Plowden Report has not begun to take effect in Britain. Although it was submitted last fall, repeated questions by members of Parliament to the secretary of state for education and science, Anthony Crosland, have met with brief replies that the results are being studied.

With British thoroughness, the Plowden committee covered every aspect of the primary schools, which are attended by children ages 5 to 11. The study began with a detailed summary of the physical, emotional and mental growth of a child from birth to adolescence. Questionnaires were sent to committee witnesses as well as to 2,500 primary- and secondary-school teachers. Representatives of the committee visited schools throughout Great Britain and six other countries. In the United States, they visited public schools and talked with college and university faculty in New York City, Syracuse, Washington, Atlanta, Santa Monica, San Francisco, Madison, New Haven, Hagerstown, Los Angeles, Chicago and Cambridge, Mass.

The council also conducted in 1964 a "National Survey of Parental Attitudes and Circumstances Related to School and Pupil Characteristics." Parents of children at three stages of primary school—"top" infant (age 6), first-year junior (age 7) and fourth-year junior (age 10)—were interviewed in the home. The children's performance was tested on reading comprehension. But despite all the original research and the field trips, much of the Plowden Report appears to be a summary of accepted knowledge on education. The report evidently did not question as many established beliefs about education as did the USOE survey.

Dr. James S. Coleman of Johns Hopkins University, who co-directed the American study, has been in England this year and is familiar with the Plowden study. "I think it is an impressive report," Coleman said, noting that it is especially comprehensive in such areas as health, building needs and curriculum. "It is a remarkable compendium of conventional knowledge."

"At the same time, the only part [of the Plowden Report] where there is a major discussion of some of these things except for conventional knowledge, is based on the national survey," Coleman said. "Exactly the same thing happened to them that happened to us. They started out using class size and it showed no relation to achievement at all. . . . The basic question of what affects student achievement is no more answered here than in our own report." Coleman also

noted that "we both found that family background was more important than school characteristics."

Although the Plowden and USOE reports do not strongly conflict with each other, they do vary on the degree of some of the findings. Plowden, for example, found parental attitude an important factor affecting student achievement to an increasing extent as the child advanced in school. Coleman takes this increasing effect of parental attitude "with some degree of caution." "If you look at their parental-attitude studies, there are technical problems involved, the question of dependent or independent variables. They didn't investigate anything about the effects of the social context of the students. We found in later years a strong effect of the educational background of other students. The educational resources brought to school by other children have more effect than the educational resources brought by the school board."

In the USOE survey, the characteristics of the school accounted for slightly less on student achievement than in the Plowden study. "I don't know why this is, but the results are close to ours," Coleman said. The British study indicated serious inequities in school facilities by social class, although this information was not shown as explicitly as in the U. S. report, which found some variance but not as much as had been expected.

In its recommendations for change, the council gave first priority to designating "educational priority areas" —neighborhoods in which children are culturally deprived—and adopting a program of "positive discrimination" in favor of these neighborhood schools and the children enrolled.

"The first step," said the council, "must be to raise the schools with low standards to the national average; the second, quite deliberately to make them better. The justification is that the homes and the neighborhoods from which many of their children come provide little support and stimulus for learning.

"The schools must provide a compensating environment. The attempts so far made within the educational system to do this have not been sufficiently generous or sustained, because the handicaps imposed by the environment have not been explicitly and sufficiently allowed for. They should be."

Thus the Plowden Report came out squarely for compensatory education, in much the same way that President Johnson embraced the concept in his education message of 1965. In the message the President offered a blueprint of what became the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Said Johnson: "I propose that we declare a national goal of Full Educational Opportunity." He then defined as a major educational task "to bring better education to millions of disadvantaged youth who need it most."

While the Plowden council recommended compensatory education, the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights expressed misgivings about the value of compensatory programs in racially and socially isolated school environments. The civil rights commission, whose report *Racial Isolation in the Public Schools*

TABLE 1

Percentage Contribution of Parental Attitudes, Home Circumstances and State of School to Variation in Educational Performance.

	Between Schools			
	Infants (Age 6)	Lower Juniors (Age 7)	Top Juniors (Age 10)	All Pupils
Parental Attitudes	24	20	39	28
Home Circumstances	16	25	17	20
State of School	20	22	12	17
*Unexplained	40	33	32	35
	100	100	100	100
	Within Schools			
	Infants (Age 6)	Lower Juniors (Age 7)	Top Juniors (Age 10)	All Pupils
Parental Attitudes	16	15	29	20
Home Circumstances	9	9	7	9
State of School	14	15	22	17
*Unexplained	61	61	42	54
	100	100	100	100

*The unexplained variation is due to differences between children which have not been covered by our variables, and also to errors in measurement. That so much variation has been explained—the amount in the between-schools analysis is remarkable for an enquiry of this kind—is due in part to the comparatively simple nature of the criterion variable, a reading comprehension test.

The object of two kinds of divisions, pupils between schools and pupils within schools, was to bring out the extent to which a school's situation depends on the neighbourhood it serves. For comparisons between schools the unit of analysis was the school, and the variables were based on the average for each school of the original variables. For comparisons within schools the variables were the deviations of each pupil from the school average . . . The comparisons between schools account for more variation than those within schools.

TABLE 2

Numbers of Children from Certain Commonwealth Countries in English Schools, 1966: (Primary and Secondary Schools)

West Indians	Indians	Pakistanis	Cypriots
57,000	24,000	7,800	13,200

Some 25 boroughs (including 11 in the Inner London Education Authority) have an immigrant population in school of more than five per cent, the highest single figure being 21 per cent. Because immigrants are concentrated in particular parts of these boroughs, the children attend few schools. In some schools, more than half the pupils are from immigrant families.

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION, HOME CIRCUMSTANCES AND SOCIAL CLASS

TABLE 67

Average scores on item clusters, analysed by social class

An item cluster is a grouping of survey questions which tended to be answered in the same way, or in statistical terms were correlated. In order to see whether parental behaviour and attitudes in six selected areas varied with social class, scores were calculated for all parents on each of the six item clusters. The items are so scored that a low average indicates a favourable position. (There is no significance in the variation in scores between the indices, i.e., the fact that the average total score of cluster (1) is 16.6 and for cluster (4) is 7.5 is an artefact of the number of items making up the cluster and the scoring system used.

Item clusters	Social class I Professional	II Managerial	III Non-manual	IV Skilled manual	V Semi-skilled	VI Un-skilled	Total
(1) Responsibility and initiative taken by parents over child's education.	15.9	15.7	16.5	16.7	16.9	17.1	16.6
(2) Relations between parents and teachers.	11.1	10.7	10.6	10.9	11.1	10.8	10.9
(3) Paternal interest and support.	9.0	10.0	10.2	11.4	12.7	12.1	11.2
(4) Whether parents devoted time and attention to child's development.	7.0	7.2	7.4	7.6	7.9	7.8	7.6
(5) Parental interest in and knowledge of the work child was doing.	10.2	10.4	10.4	10.9	10.9	11.4	10.8
(6) Literacy of home.	8.8	9.7	9.6	10.9	11.3	12.0	10.7
Number of parents (100%*)	(110)	(430)	(338)	(1,486)	(499)	(189)	(3,092)

* The 40 parents for whom social class information was not available are included in the total column but excluded from the body of the table.

was based largely on the USOE survey, found that none of the compensatory education programs which it examined "appear to have raised significantly the achievement of particiapting pupils." The commission, which advocated a program of racial balancing in the schools, questioned whether dramatic and costly steps, such as reducing the pupil-teacher ratio to 25-1 or 15-1, "would be sufficient to overcome the effects of racial and class isolation." The CCR report stated, however, that it was evaluating specific compensatory programs and not the theory of compensatory education.

Lady Plowden's council recommended these steps in deprived-area schools:

1. No class of more than 30 pupils. (In 1965, the average class size in English primary schools was 30.7 and 17 per cent of the pupils were in classes of more than 40 pupils. The council said that "although positive evidence from research in favour of small classes is lacking, this does not outweigh professional advice, public opinion and the example of other countries.")
2. Salary supplements for every teacher amounting to £120 ($336) a year.
3. Teachers' aides at a ratio of one to every two classrooms.
4. New and renovated buildings where needed.
5. Extra books and equipment.
6. Expansion of nursery education for three- and four-year-olds, which the council recommended for all schools, should begin in the deprived areas.
7. A continuing link between colleges of education and deprived-area schools, with student teachers doing a part of their practice teaching in these schools.
8. In-service training of teachers.
9. Development and concentration of social work in conjunction with schools.
10. Priority in establishing community schools, which are open beyond the ordinary school hours for the use of children, their parents and, exceptionally, for other members of the community.

Plowden devotes only a small section to the education problems of nonwhite immigrants from Commonwealth nations. No attempt was made to measure the effects of desegregation, as in the American counterpart. Britain has developed, in the last 10 to 15 years, a colored minority with educational problems similar to those in the States, but the intensity is much less in England. For the 1966 school year, the immigrant children in the state schools represented less than 2 per cent of the total school population, according to the Department of Education and Science.

Immigrants from the West Indies, Pakistan, India, Malta and Cyprus have settled in the large industrial cities, where they were drawn by the postwar labor shortages. It is in these areas where the immigrants—many of them non-English-speaking and most of them from rural backgrounds—create problems by their numbers. The West Indians, who speak their own version of English, make up more than half of the nation's immigrant population and in some instances comprise up to 50 per cent of an individual school's enrollment.

J. E. B. Rose, director of the Survey of Race Relations in Great Britain, considers as "incidental" the sections of the Plowden Report dealing with immigrant children. He sees the West Indian's crowded home conditions as "more akin" to those of the English working class. "The West-Indian parent is not very different from the working-class parent. The handicaps which the working-class parent offers to the working-class child are much the same as the West Indian. The values the children find at school are middle class or the teachers have middle-class backgrounds."

As for the other immigrant children, most of them are non-English-speaking. "It is disquieting," Rose said, "that the children of non-English-speaking parents are doing better than the English-speaking West Indians. The reason is that the Indian and Cypriot attitude towards education . . . is more positive. They revere education more for its own sake. In this respect the Indian parent, though an immigrant, shows an attitude more middle-class."

Plowden did make some recommendations to cope with the immigrant problems directly, proposing that:

- Colleges, institutes of education and local education authorities expand opportunities for training teachers in teaching English to immigrants and to increase their knowledge of immigrant children's backgrounds.
- Suitable materials and methods be developed for teaching English to immigrant children.
- Schools with special language problems be generously staffed, perhaps with student volunteers.

The report said dispersal of immigrant students to avoid concentration in any one school may be necessary, but "language and other difficulties should be the criteria."

In view of these recommendations, the proposed program of "positive discrimination" to improve educational opportunities in disadvantaged areas, and the suggestions for increased co-operation between the schools and parents, Rose believes that the Plowden Report has "extremely valuable relevance" to the problems of immigrant children.

Special Attention For England's Disadvantaged

Selections from England's Plowden Report on the special attention proposed for schools attended by culturally disadvantaged children.

What these deprived areas need most are perfectly normal, good primary schools alive with experience from which children of all kinds can benefit. What we say elsewhere about primary school work generally applies equally to these difficult areas. The best schools already there show that it is absurd to say, as one used to hear, "it may be all very well in a nice suburb, but it won't work here." But, of course, there are special and additional demands on teachers who work in deprived areas with deprived children. They meet special challenges. Teachers must be constantly aware that ideas, values and relationships within the school may conflict with those of the home, and that the world assumed by teachers and school books may be unreal to the children. There will have to be constant communication between parents and the schools if the aims of the schools are to be fully understood. The child from a really impoverished background may well have had a normal, satisfactory emotional life. What he often lacks is the opportunity to develop intellectual interests. This shows in his poor command of language. It is not, however, with vocabulary that teaching can begin. The primary school must first supply experiences and establish relationships which enable children to discriminate, to reason and to express themselves. Placing such children in the right stance for further learning is a very skilled operation. But those who have done remedial work will be aware of the astonishing rapidity of the progress which can be achieved, particularly in extending vocabulary, once children's curiosity is released. The thrust to learn seems to be latent in every child, at least within a very wide range of normality. But however good the opportunities, some children may not be able to take advantage of them. Failure may have taken away from them their urge to learn. *(Pages 51-52)*

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We propose a nation-wide scheme for helping those schools and neighbourhoods in which children are most severely handicapped. This policy will have an influence over the whole educational system, and it colours all the subsequent recommendations in our Report. It must not be put into practice simply by robbing more fortunate areas of all the opportunities for progress to which they have been looking forward; it can only succeed if a larger share of the nation's resources is devoted to education. *(Page 53)*

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The proposition that good schools should make up for a poor environment is far from new. It derives from the notion that there should be equality of opportunity for all, but recognizes that children in some districts will only get the same opportunity as those who live elsewhere if they have unequally generous treatment. It was accepted before the first world war that some children could not be effectively taught until they had been properly fed. Hence free meals were provided. Today their need is for enriched intellectual nourishment. Planned and positive discrimination in favour of deprived areas could bring about an advance in the education of children in the 1970s as great as the advance in their nutrition to which school meals and milk contributed so much. *(Page 57)*

★ ★ ★

The last three reports by the Council and the Robbins report on higher education produced evidence that shows how closely associated are social circumstances and academic achievement. We have been able to set on foot research which has suggested that the most vital factor in a child's home is the attitude to school, and all that goes on there, of his mother and father. The interested parent has the interested child. In contrast we have been conscious of the unfairness that dogs many boys and girls through life. The loss to them, the loss to the community that arises because of the inequality of educational opportunity, is avoidable and in consequence intolerable. We have, therefore, deliberately given their needs the first priority among our recommendations even though this may delay for a while long overdue benefits for the greater number of children. Our proposal for the introduction of educational priority areas, a detailed plan for dealing with a situation to which the Council's last report also drew attention, is sufficiently urgent to be put forward for immediate action even in the present economic difficulties. *(Page 461)*